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Subject: **Walter Hansel Winery - Russian River Burgundy**
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Charles River Wine Company, Inc.
Winery Profile: Walter Hansel



Walter Hansel Vineyards

"Russian River at an amazing value"

Walter Hansel was a lifelong wine enthusiast who had the vision to plant his estate's original 250 vines in 1978. Today, Stephen, Walter's son, has taken up where his father left off, pursuing his vision of producing world-class Burgundian-styled Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, all from the Russian River Valley.

Steve Hansel's friend, famed winemaker Tom Rochioli, helped him in the early stages of his wine education by inviting him to work a couple of harvests at the Rochioli vineyards. Steve performed his first solo attempt in 1996 out of his garage.

Since all their grapes are grown on their own property, they can exercise strict control in the vineyards, which are planted with 5 Pinot and 5 Chardonnay clones. Each clone was chosen for its specific acid and flavor profiles. These wines all vary in flavors, acid content, and to a lesser degree, texture. They are an expression of their individual soils, environment and clones.

Stephen still lives in the same house he grew up in. He hid his winery because he doesn't want to show off ego, it's about making wine. The emphasis is on low yields (a miniscule range from 1.5 to 2.7 tons/acre) for greater complexity.

All of Stephen's fruit is hand-harvested, and it is re-examined again at the winery. Hansel makes an average of 9 total passes through each vineyard. Each pass is time consuming and expensive but Stephen feels the vine rewards him with more concentrated flavors.

The winery uses only natural yeast during fermentation. Fining and filtration are minimal. The Pinots are held on the lees without racking for 12 months. The Chardonnays are whole cluster fermented and gently pressed to extract the juice. The cooperage varies from year-to-year, cuvée-to-cuvée, but none of the wine is aged on entirely new oak. One- and two-year-old barrels are always employed. From start to finish, Hansel focuses on quality. Wood buying is not treated lightly. He prefers to air dry his French Oak for 3 years as opposed to the average of 2. His fruit goes through whole cluster press, not stem or crusher, in which 40% of volume can be lost.

Unheralded but Industry Known

The only winery working with Hansel fruit, Dan Petroski of Larkmead offered this comment: "Hansel wines are very good, probably the best value Pinot and Chardonnay in the market right now."

"You don't find guys like Stephen Hansel in the wine business very often. He owns several car dealerships in Sonoma, and wine is just his "little" hobby. Even with all the high scores and press lately, his prices have remained incredibly low. Plus, he doesn't plan on raising his prices, or increasing production." writes the Benchmark Wine Group.

Robert Parker agrees: "One of northern California's "good guys" is undeniably Stephen Hansel, who fashions top-quality Burgundian-styled Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Tom Rochioli first brought these wines to my attention, and Hansel is now one of my reference point visits in the North Coast. Known locally as a major car dealer, Hansel founded the winery in 1978 and now owns over 80 acres under vine. These are all noteworthy cuvees that remain somewhat under the radar. Moreover, prices remain unbelievably fair for wines of such quality."

2007 Walter Hansel Sauvignon Blanc - Stephen decided to produce Sauvignon Blanc mainly to bridge the gap between Chardonnay releases. Vibrant citrus, dried pear and beeswax aromas kindle memories of a Loire Valley chenin blanc. Firm, dry, sharply focused lemon and pear flavors display good depth and finishing cut. No herbal or grassy character here, but there's an attractively fleshy texture and deep fruit.

The grapes come from a source less than a mile from the Hansel vineyard in the Russian River Valley. It is 100% stainless steel fermented. \$160/cs

2007 Walter Hansel Estate Chardonnay - This wine is a blend of all five estate Chardonnay clones with an emphasis on Hansel's original vines, which range in age from 15- to 30-years-old. These clusters are larger and have larger berries and thicker skins. They tend to show more fruit and provide great texture. In comparison to the other Hansel Chards, the Estate consistently produces wines with the greatest fruit and acidity.

"The 2007 Chardonnay Estate is a terrific value, exhibiting notes of tropical fruit, smoked nuts, excellent acidity, and a broad, savory mouth-feel. **91 Points Parker**". \$288/cs

2007 Walter Hansel Estate Pinot Noir - Usually a blend of clones, for this vintage the Estate Pinot Noir was made entirely of the Rochioli clone of Pinot Noir. It is 100% estate grown fruit -- Stephen does not purchase any grapes.

"The 2007 Pinot Noir Estate, exhibits sandy, loamy soil notes intermixed with sweet raspberry and black cherries. The

wine is medium to full-bodied, displays noble ripe tannins, and good freshness. This wine should drink nicely for 5-6 years. **92 Points Parker**". \$320/cs

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Don't miss out - you will surprise and delight your customers with these wines - talk to your CRWC sales representative about Walter Hansel. Contact us about using this email for your store's marketing program!

Written by Arik Colbath with excerpts from walterhanselwinery.com

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